DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 106 030 RC 008 499

AUTHOR	Coleman, A. Lee; Gabbard, Anne V.
TITLE	Is the Quality of Life in the Kentucky Mountains Improving? The Opinions of Community "Knowledgeables" and Ordinary Residents in Four Eastern Kentucky Counties, RS-39.
INSTITUTION	Kentucky Univ., Lexington. Agricultural Experiment Station.; Kentucky Univ., Lexington. Dept. of Sociology.
SPONS AGENCY	Cooperative State Research Service (DOA), Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO	KAES-RS-39; USDA-CSRS-S-79
PUB DATE	Jan 74
NOTE	11p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS	*Attitudes; Change Agents; Changing Attitudes; *Community Leaders; Comparative Analysis; Family (Sociological Unit); *Heads of Households; Housewives; *Living Standards; Municipalities; *Rural Areas; Tables (Data)
IDENTIFIERS	Kentucky; *Quality Of Life; Residents

ABSTRACT

As part of a larger study aimed at assessing how local people view recent changes and development programs in four Eastern Kentucky counties (Harlan, Perry, Whitley, and Wolfe), a survey on perceived quality of life was conducted. Data were derived from personal interviews with selected local leaders (varying from 21 to 33 interviews per county) and from 464 representative household heads or homemakers (220 male and 244 female respondents) living in either open country areas (320) or town areas (144). The survey question asked was: "In general and on the average, would you say that the quality of life for most people in this county has improved, gotten worse or remained about the same during the past 10 years?" Leaders and residents were queried as to their opinions about changes in the quality of life for "most people" and for their "own families." Results, tabulated by place of residence (town or country) for residents but not for leaders, indicated that despite differences, most ordinary people and most leaders viewed the changes of the past decade favorably. Since these counties still rank low on most objective indicators of development, it was concluded that the people's subjective assessment of their quality of life may be as important as measures of present status or level. (JC)

ED106030

IS THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE KENTUCKY MOUNTAINS IMPROVING?

THE OPINIONS OF COMMUNITY "KNOWLEDGEABLES" AND ORDINARY RESIDENTS

IN FOUR EASTERN KENTUCKY COUNTIES

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

RECEIVED
APR 23 1975
E.R.I.C.

by A. Lee Coleman and Anne V. Gabbard

Department of Sociology
University of Kentucky
College of Agriculture
Agricultural Experiment Station
Lexington

(50) 9/16/74

RS-39
January, 1974

RC008499

IS THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE KENTUCKY MOUNTAINS IMPROVING?

THE OPINIONS OF COMMUNITY "KNOWLEDGEABLES" AND ORDINARY RESIDENTS IN FOUR EASTERN KENTUCKY COUNTIES*

by A. Lee Coleman and Anne V. Gabbard**

The 1960's and early 1970's were prosperous years for most Americans. Many saw incomes increase, luxuries accumulate, and the "good life" materialize. But the economic prosperity that most Americans were experiencing did not reach to the same extent into all areas of the country. Thus the sixties saw the establishment of numerous development commissions and agencies, as federal and state governments tried to improve the quality of life for people in heretofore neglected regions of the United States. One area given particular attention in such efforts has been Appalachia, of which Eastern Kentucky is a part.

To get some idea how the local people view the recent changes and the effect of development programs in their areas, the Department of Sociology conducted an opinion survey in four Eastern Kentucky counties: Harlan, Perry, Whitley, and Wolfe. Two of the counties, Harlan and Perry, are deep in Appalachia and rely heavily on coal mining for employment and income. Each has one or more towns of 3,000 to 6,000 population (Hazard, Harlan, Cumberland), and most of the other people live in villages and coal camps. The other two counties are nearer the Appalachian fringe and have considerable agriculture. Whitley County has a town of 12,000 (Corbin) and one of 4,000 population (Williamsburg), whereas Wolfe County is completely rural, with Campton, its county seat, having fewer than 500 people.

---

*This report is a part of Southern Regional Research Project 79, "Rural Development and the Quality of Life in the Rural South," supported by the Agricultural Experiment Stations of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, South Carolina and Tennessee. Only Kentucky data are used in this report.

**Appreciation is extended to C. Milton Coughenour for counsel and collaboration and to Dong I. Kim and Cornelia Morgan for research assistance.

Interviewing in these counties was carried out in two stages. In the summer of 1971 selected leaders (also termed "knowledgeables") were interviewed. These were persons who either held official positions, were knowledgeable in some particular area, such as health care, or were generally recognized as leaders in the county. The number of interviews per county varied from 21 to 33. A household survey was conducted in May and June, 1973. Either the homemaker or the household head was interviewed in each of 464 households, 320 in the open country and small villages and 144 in the towns. These households constituted a representative sample of each county, and they were proportioned among the counties according to county population. There were 220 male and 244 female respondents.

The household heads in the sample were somewhat older than the average for the United States, with a median age of 54 years compared with 48 for the U.S. In the sample 36 percent of the household heads were either unemployed, disabled, or retired; and 44 percent of the households derived the major portion of their income from Social Security, pensions, or public assistance. The median family income for the sample was considerably lower than the medians for the state and the United States, $4,630 compared with $7,441 and $9,590, respectively (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1970). Although incomes of rural families are usually lower than those of urban families, the median income of the sample families--who were mostly rural by the Census definition--was less than the median incomes for rural families nationally or in the state.

The educational attainment of household heads in the sample was a little lower than that of the rural population in Kentucky: 8.4 and 8.7 years, respectively (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1970). This is considerably lower than the educational attainment of all persons 25 years of age or older in Kentucky, 9.9 years, and substantially lower than the figure for the U.S. as a whole, 12.1 years (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1970).

These figures indicate that the household heads and homemakers (also referred to as "residents") in the sample were fairly representative of all heads and homemakers in these four counties. Because of heavy outmigration in recent decades there were more older people than elsewhere. Older people tend to have had fewer years of schooling and they are more often on pensions or welfare. The leaders interviewed are believed to be a pretty good cross-section of the more knowledgeable people in these counties, but there are no census data with which to compare their characteristics.

QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE COUNTY

Both leaders and the respondents in the household survey were asked:

"In general and on the average, would you say that the quality of life for most people in this county has improved, gotten worse, or remained about the same during the past 10 years?"

They were told that the term "quality of life" meant not just income and economics but the degree of satisfaction with all aspects of life. The question was not asked of anyone who had come to the county less than 8 years previously or who had spent fewer than 5 of the last 10 years in the county.

Most of the leaders and "knowledgeables" felt that the quality of life in their county had improved over the past 10 years. In the two Appalachian fringe counties, Whitley and Wolfe, not a single one thought that life had gotten worse and over 90 percent thought it had improved. Leaders in the two coal mining counties were somewhat less unanimous in discerning improvement; nevertheless, the great majority said that things had improved. However, almost 10 percent of the leaders in Harlan County thought that things had gotten worse, compared with none in Whitley and Wolfe counties and only one out of 30 in Perry County.

Although the majority of the household heads and homemakers in each county saw an improvement in the quality of life, the proportions were not so high as among the leaders. In Whitley and Wolfe counties slightly more than 70 percent of the ordinary residents saw improvement, compared with 90 percent of the leaders. Two-thirds of the residents saw improvement in Harlan and Perry counties, compared with 8 out of 10 leaders. About 20 percent of the residents of these coal-mining counties felt that things have gotten worse in the past decade and almost as many more said that things were about the same. Even in Whitley and Wolfe counties, about a fourth of the residents thought life was about the same or worse, while fewer than one in 10 of the leaders thought this. (Table 1 gives the complete figures.)

When the opinions of household heads and homemakers living in the open country and the small villages and mining camps are compared with those of their counterparts in the larger towns, it is seen that the town people more often felt that life had improved (Table 2). In this respect they were similar to the leaders, most of whom also lived in the towns. Still, in every county a majority even of the people outside the towns saw improvement. Again, the two Appalachian fringe counties showed a higher percentage seeing an improvement in the quality of life than did the coal-mining counties. More than two-thirds of the country residents in Whitley and Wolfe counties saw an improvement and an even higher percentage of the town people did. This contrasts with Harlan County, in which only 56 percent of the village and rural residents and 71 percent

0005

Table 1.--Opinions about Changes in the Quality of Life for Most People in the County.

Opinion	Harlan		Perry		Whitley		Wolfe		All	
	Leaders	Residents	Leaders	Residents	Leaders	Residents	Leaders	Residents	Leaders	Residents
	-percentages-									
Improved	78	62	87	65	91	74	93	72	86	68
Worse	9	19	3	20	0	12	0	16	4	17
Same	13	19	10	15	9	14	7	12	10	15
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	(n=32)	(n=145)	(n=30)	(n=81)	(n=22)	(n=122)	(n=27)	(n=51)	(n=111)	(n=399)

9000

Table 2.--Opinions of Household Heads and Homemakers about Changes in the Quality of Life for Most People in the County, by Place of Residence.

Opinion	Harlan		Perry		Whitley		Wolfe		All	
	Town*	Country	Town	Country	Town	Country	Town**	Country	Town	Country
	-percentages-									
Improved	71	56	78	60	34	69	--	70	78	63
Worse	14	23	0	28	8	14	--	17	9	20
Same	15	21	22	12	8	17	--	13	13	17
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	--	100	100	100
	(n=58)	(n=87)	(n=23)	(n=58)	(n=39)	(n=83)	--	(n=46)	(n=125)	(n=274)

*As used here, "town" and "country" are not equivalent to the Census terms, "urban" and "rural." All incorporated places (the smallest had 377 people), and unincorportated places of 1,000 or more population, were classed as towns. All other areas, including open country and unincorporated villages and coal camps with less than 1,000 population, were classed as "country."

**Only five town residents in sample.

of the town residents saw an improvement. The distribution of opinions in Perry County was similar, but the percentages were slightly higher. Whereas relatively few citizens in the larger towns felt that the quality of life in the county had become worse, considerably larger percentages of rural and village residents, particularly in Harlan and Perry counties, thought things had become worse (23 and 28 percent, respectively). This distribution of opinions by residence within the counties is shown in Table 2.

Regardless of age, sex, income or educational differences, three-fourths or more of the town people in the four counties combined saw improvement in the quality of life for most people in the county. Male respondents, respondents who are under 50 years of age, those with less than nine grades of schooling, and those who derived their principal income from pensions or welfare assessed the changes even more optimistically than others. In the small villages and open country there was little difference in opinion between the sexes or on the basis of age, but education, income, and source of income made a difference. Here the better educated, those with higher income, and those with principal income from salary, wages and profits were considerably more optimistic than those with lower income and education and principal income from pensions and welfare.

Perhaps it was to be expected, as was the case among country residents, that those who were less well educated, had small incomes, and depended on pensions or welfare would be less likely to feel that the quality of life in their county had improved. But it is surprising that this did not hold true in the towns, where, in fact, the tendency was just the opposite. It is likely that each person perceives and judges the quality of life in the entire county on the basis of conditions immediately surrounding him. The poorer people in the country are perhaps more isolated and alienated and surrounded by people in the same situation, so they view things somewhat more pessimistically, whereas people in the towns see prosperity and level of living improvements around them even though they may not personally share them. Still, more than half of all groups saw improvement, and no more than a quarter of any group said the quality of life was worse for most people.

In the towns men were somewhat more optimistic than women in their perception of a quality of life improvement, and younger respondents more optimistic than the older ones. In the country there were only slight differences between men and women or on the basis of age, but the differences were in the same direction.

0007

Asked why or in what ways the quality of life had improved, the leaders and residents alike most often mentioned economic factors, health care, and government assistance programs, with improvements in education and roads next most often mentioned. Counties did not vary much in the factors mentioned most often. Likewise, responses from town and country residents were quite similar. The few people who said things had gotten worse, and specified how, mostly mentioned business, employment and income.

QUALITY OF LIFE IN OWN FAMILY

Having asked both leaders and ordinary citizens for their perception of changes in the county's quality of life, interviewers then asked these same respondents about changes in their own family situations during the past 10 years. The leaders and "knowledgeables" evaluated the changes in their own family situations quite differently from the way they viewed county changes. Whereas 86 percent of the leaders saw improvement in the county's quality of life, only 56 percent felt that their own family situations were better. They did not think that their situations had actually deteriorated, however; only 4 percent thought things had become worse. Among the counties, leaders' evaluations of their own family situations were quite diverse, ranging from 28 percent in Perry County to 86 percent in Whitley County who saw their family situations as improved (Table 3).

On the whole, ordinary citizens, a little more often than the leaders, felt that their own family situations were better than they had been 10 years ago. In Whitley County the leaders were more optimistic than the residents, in Perry and Wolfe they were less so, and in Harlan the same proportion of each said their situation was better. However, more of the ordinary residents than of the leaders in each county felt that things had become worse for their families. Opinions of residents were quite consistent among the counties, ranging from 55 percent who saw improvement in Whitley County to 66 percent in Harlan County.

Just as town residents, more often than those in the country, perceived the quality of life in the county as improved, so they more often felt that their own family situations had improved. In the three counties where town and country could be compared, a majority of both town and rural residents said their family situations had improved, but the majority was considerably greater among the town dwellers (Table 4).

A respondents's evaluation of his own family's quality of life changes seemed to depend, in both town and country, on his place of residence, age, education, income and income source, but there were sex differences only in the country. Older persons, both town and rural dwellers, less

0008

Table 3.--Opinions about Changes in the Quality of Life of Respondent's Own Family.

Opinion	Harlan		Perry		Whitley		Wolfe		All	
	Leaders	Residents	Leaders	Residents	Leaders	Residents	Leaders	Residents	Leaders	Residents
	-percentages-									
Better	66	66	28	60	86	55	44	57	56	60
Worse	3	8	4	9	0	16	8	10	4	11
Same	31	26	68	31	14	29	48	33	40	29
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	(n=32)	(n=145)	(n=25)	(n=81)	(n=22)	(n=123)	(n=25)	(n=51)	(n=104)	(n=400)

6009

Table 4.--Opinions of Household Heads and Homemakers about Changes in the Quality of Life of Respondent's Own Family, by Place of Residence.

Opinion	Harlan		Perry		Whitley		Wolfe		All	
	Town*	Country	Town	Country	Town	Country	Town**	Country	Town	Country
	-percentages-									
Better	71	61	70	57	62	51	--	59	67	57
Worse	2	13	4	10	13	18	--	9	6	13
Same	27	26	26	33	25	31	--	33	27	30
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	--	100	100	100
	(n=59)	(n=86)	(n=23)	(n=58)	(n=40)	(n=83)	--	(n=46)	(n=127)	(n=273)

*See footnote, Table 2

**Only five town residents in sample

often considered their situations improved than did those younger. Of those 50 years of age or older and living in the villages or open country, 51 percent saw improvement in their own family situations, compared with 65 percent of those less than 50 years of age. The percentages of people in the towns seeing improvement in their circumstances were 58 and 78 for the respective age groups. Again the town percentages were somewhat higher, with the differences between the age groups being larger.

Those who were better educated, whether town or country residents, more often saw their situations as improved than did the less well educated. However, town residents with 9 or more years of schooling more often felt their situations had improved than did country people with the same educational attainment (73 to 67 percent, respectively). Only a little more than half of both town and country residents with less than 9 years of schooling perceived their situations as improved. Even so, very few of the less well educated felt that their situations had worsened; those who saw no betterment mostly said that their situations had remained the same.

There was a considerable difference in opinions between low and high income groups, both in the towns and in the open country. About 80 percent of both town and country residents making $7,000 or more annually felt that their own family situations had improved over the past 10 years. Of those making less than $7,000 a year, only 57 percent of the town dwellers and 49 percent of the country residents saw an improvement, and a third of both felt that their situations had remained the same. Of those persons receiving the bulk of their income from Social Security, welfare, or pensions, just half in each residence category saw an improvement in their family circumstances over the past decade. More than a third of these people said that things had remained the same for them. On the other hand, most of those whose income was derived from salary, wages, or profits did see an improvement--76 percent of the town and 68 percent of the country people. And a fifth of both groups said that things had remained the same. Few people in any category felt that their situations had deteriorated.

In the country there was practically no difference between men's and women's responses about changes in their family situations, with a little more than half of each seeing improvement. But in the towns 79 percent of the men and only 58 percent of the women said they were better off. Most of the other town women said their family situation was about the same as it was 10 years earlier. In the country similar proportions of men and women said their situation was unchanged. Very few of any group said they were worse off, but the proportion saying this was greater in the country than in the town.

CONCLUSION

Despite all differences, it seems clear that most ordinary people as well as most of the leaders and "knowledgeables" in the counties viewed the changes over the past decade favorably. Since these counties still rank low on most objective indicators of development, economic welfare, and quality of life, it appears that in the people's subjective assessment of their quality of life their perception of whether things are moving in the right direction may be at least as important as measures of present status or level. And in all groups--leaders and ordinary residents, town residents and country residents, people who are well-off and people who are poor--half or more perceive things as "getting better."

This report has been concerned with the subjective aspect of quality of life, how people feel about the direction of change in their life situation. Other reports from this study will present comparative objective data on socio-economic and environmental factors.*

*See, for example, reports already published--RS-35, 36, 37, and 38